

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 5, 2005

Honorable Mark V. Rosenker
Acting Chairman
National Transportation Safety Board
490 L'Enfant Plaza East, S.W.
Washington DC, 20594

Dear Chairman Rosenker,

I write today to express my concern about the safety and reliability of composite rudders on Airbus A310 and A300 aircraft, and ask that you reopen the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) investigation in to the November 2001 American Airlines Flight 587 crash. While I appreciate your board's thorough look in to the crash, I urge you, in light of similar recent incidents involving A310 and A300 aircraft, to reconsider the possibility that a defective rudder on the plane caused the accident.

One specific incident involving a Canadian Charter Airbus A310 flying from Cuba to Quebec raises serious questions about the stability of composite rudders in flight. At 35,000 feet above the Caribbean, the pilots of Air Transit flight 961 began experiencing something "very unusual" as the 28 foot long rudder became dislodged from the plane and plunged into the sea. Luckily, the crew and the 270 passengers were able to land safely. But the similarity between this incident and the incident in New York City more than three years ago are striking.

Though initial reports concluded that American Airlines Flight 587's rudder came off during take-off, the NTSB determined, in its final report released this month that pilot error was actually to blame. Though I do not disagree with your findings, I believe that given the similarities between this, the Quebec flight, and other incidents involving A300 and A310 aircraft, it requires you reopen your investigation to consider this possibility.

I appreciate the NTSB's efforts and role in the investigation, but I think there is more to this story. As you know, the Federal Aviation Administration has initiated its own comprehensive review of all aircraft using composite rudders in light of these findings. I hope you will act in kind and take the actions necessary to ensure that the entire story of American Flight 587 is told and a similar tragedy never happens again.

Sincerely,


Charles E. Schumer
US Senator